The Builder.

No. CCCXCIX.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1850.

SURELY we are a most unfortunate people in regard to our public works and buildings. No matter what the purpose or the design; no sooner is it proposed to rear an edifice for the accommodation of the public, the convenience of the state, or the dignity and comfort of the Sovereign, than a thousand querulous pens are instantly called into requisition to thwart and hinder its accomplishment; too often, alas! on good grounds; but as often not.

All idea of national sentiment and the credit of the country seems utterly lost in the desire to confound and perplex the plans of those who are called upon by their official position to take the initiative or carry into ultimate effect the desired object. First comes the wrangling over the estimates; which generally ends, as in the well-known examples of Buckingham Palace and the National Gallery, in their being cut down to such an extent as to preclude all adequate grandeur of thought and conception relative to the purpose intended.

The question sought to be solved is not what extent of pecuniary means is requisite to carry into complete effect a design which shall be advantageous to the public and an honour to the country to all future time; but, how much can the minister contrive, by the utmost diligence of the whipper-in, and the support of the favourable portion of the press, to persuade a feeble majority to assist him in obtaining. But suppose, after much painstaking and interest on the part of the public, as in the case of the new Houses of Parliament, a design generally approved be in the first instance obtained; the quarrel then becomes not less fierce over the necessary adjuncts of its completion.

A bad commercial year intervenes, a cry for the curtailment of expenses becomes universal, the required amount is consequently reduced, and some of the chief characteristics and features of the original design are either altogether omitted, or so altered, as to destroy the general effect of the whole. By and by, after years of delay, the costly structure is at length finished; but the circumstances which led to its defect or deformity are either unknown or wholly forgotten; and the thoughtless or ignorant portion of the public, seeing only the result, abuse the architect, and growl and grumble over their bad buildings, as well they may. Thus it is, that other nations less wealthy and less free than ourselves, and whose institutions are less consolidated than our own, nevertheless, through the influence of public spirit, and a superior love and cultivation of the arts, contrive immeasurably to surpass us in those public works and exhibitions which serve to dignify and adorn their country.

We are now in the heat of a social war about the planting and laying out of an acre of ground in front of that luckless and ugly residence of the sovereigns of England, which, for the last thirty years, has served the public and the press with an endless theme of vituperation and invective.

The opponents have succeeded in reducing the estimates for the proposed alteration from 26,000*l.* to 11,000*l.*! Oh, mighty triumph of economical legislation, which will probably secure us at least the consistency of bad approaches to a bad façade.

If the design itself be unsuitable, it should not be persevered in, but delayed till a better can be prepared; but if the plan be good, to leave a building incomplete for such a consideration, after the sums already expended, seems the height of folly.

With regard to the marble arch, the most feasible plan seems to be to make it an entrance to the park from Trafalgar-square. But then comes again the question of economy—that ever easy theme of palatable declamation. So that for all time to come this costly structure is to be placed in some inferior situation, because a country, whose revenue is fifty millions, cannot afford to place it on an appropriate site. Better, then, break it up at once, sell the materials for what they will fetch, and apply the proceeds to complete some one thing decently.

There is a certain description of the public expenditure which it is unwise in a nation too closely to curtail.

Buildings that are designed for the public benefit, and calculated to be of a permanent and enduring character, ought to be so distinguished by their construction and appearance, as of themselves to excite interest and command general respect. To deprive them of this is to lessen both their useful influence on the growing mind of the country, and the value of the institutions they represent in the public eye. For a State, while surrounded on every hand with evidences of private wealth and grandeur, to be parsimonious in providing the external symbols of its importance, is to lessen its value in the general esteem. These, as their objects are permanent, so to speak, constitute the assets of the nation. They are not personal, either to the Sovereign or the officers of state, but they are the property of the public, and have effect on the public, and as such should be made to contribute to its glory and renown. The expense connected with such important objects is comparative only. When once incurred, it serves its purpose for ever, and constitutes a perpetual memorial to the honour and patriotism of the country. It would be as well, perhaps, if our economists would sometimes consider that public money so expended bears its own interest, as well in the convenience it affords to posterity as in the benefit it confers upon the present generation. Unlike annual grants to individuals, which, however deservedly conferred, or worthily distributed, leave not a fragment to tell to future times the munificent liberality of those who bestowed them; our public edifices, while they serve to encourage the arts, to elevate the character of the people, and to give employment and support to thousands of honest and industrious artisans and handicraftsmen, serve also as enduring monuments to the taste and genius and honour of the present age.

THE GIGANTIC STATUE OF BAVARIA.—This long talked of statue is now placed on the hill of Saint Theresa, near Munich. The bronze of the statue has cost 92,600fl. or 234,080f. It has taken eight years to cast, and is to be inaugurated on the return of King Louis to Munich.

THE KINGSTON KINGS' STONE.

THE inhabitants of Kingston-upon-Thames have done a creditable thing. They have rescued the old stone on which tradition says the Saxon Kings crowned here were placed, from the obscurity and degradation into which it had fallen, and have set it up with all honour upon a pedestal near Clattern Bridge, with an inclosure about it of stone and iron. In the autumn of last year, when called in professionally to advise as to the state of Kingston church, we referred to the connection of the town with our early kings, and suggested to two or three persons that the stone to which tradition had always pointed should be preserved.* Whatever can suggest a history or inspire a worthy sentiment is deserving of care. We went no farther, however, and the matter dropped. It was left for Mr. H. H. Young, of Leamington, to suggest to members of the corporation the propriety of forming it into a monument. Mr. Shrubsole, Mr. Ranyard, Mr. Gould, Mr. Pamphilon (the present mayor), and others took it up, and on the 19th of this month the result of their conjoined exertions was opened to the public, when there were a breakfast and varied rejoicings. Three poetical *à propos* effusions were printed and circulated, and a well-executed medal by Mr. W. J. Taylor, of London, was struck on the occasion.

The stone (which is said to be similar in mineralogical character to those forming Stonehenge) is about 3 feet 6 inches in height and 22 inches wide. The end of it has been let into a heptagonal pedestal of Bath stone inscribed on the several sides, "Eadward, 901," "Adelstan, 924," "Eadmund, 943," "Eadred, 946," "Eadwin, 955," "Eadwerd, 975," and "Ædelred, 978." In each face of the stone, above the name, a coin of the respective king is inserted.† The inclosure consists of seven small pillars of Purbeck marble, with Bath stone caps and bases, connected by a cast-iron railing of interlaced arches, seven in each space. The caps are Saxonishly sculptured, and have conical terminations, each surmounted by a large iron spear-head, which may as well be removed, since, if not previously broken off or stolen, which seems likely, they will, in time, damage the caps.

The arrangement was designed by Mr. Davis, of Bath. The cost of the work, we understand, will be about 140*l.*: 50*l.* were given by the corporation, and the committee made themselves liable for the remainder, to be raised by subscription.

Improvement of the town may be expected to result, from the setting up of this memento of a time when it was called *Kyningestun, famosa illa locus.*

We will end our notice with some lines which were written for the occasion by Mr. Martin Tupper:—

Rejoice! that Praise and Honour at length
Return to their ancient rest.—
As a wounded eagle gathers his strength
To recover his rock-built nest;
For of old, around yon rugged throne
Tradition tenderly clungs.
To hail that stone, as its brother of Scone,
The Throne of the Seven Kings!

EDWARD THE ELDER there was crown'd,
Great ALFRED's glorious son.—
And ATHELSTAN, thro' the wide world renown'd
For merchant-trophies won.—
EDMUND, and ETHELRED, on high state,
With ELDRED, and EDWY THE FAIR,
And EDWARD, due to a MARTYR's fate,
Were throned in honour there!

Thou then, such ancestry's Royal seed,
Britannia's Heiress-Queen!
In grace consider the loyal deed
Thy Saxon children mean.
To the time-hallowed Past its homage due
The Present wisely brings,
And thus would we pour our chrism anew
On the Throne of the Seven Kings!

BELGIAN TILES AND BRICKS.—Some large importations of roofing tiles and bricks are taking place at the present time from Antwerp, the manufacture of Belgium.

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* See page 396 of present volume.

† The coins were presented by Mr. Walter Hawkins and Mr. Cuff. Mr. Hawkins also presented a book to each of the 700 children in the Kingston schools.

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